



Big Boi and Andre 3000 of Outkast

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FEATURE

A Guide To Southern Hip-Hop: Definitive Releases, Artists & Subgenres From The Dirty South



A geographical region far larger than the coasts, the South stretches from Texas to Virginia and includes myriad subgenres. Home to Outkast, Big Freedia, Ludacris and many others, the Third Coast has something to say in its own language.

TAYLOR CRUMPTON

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For decades, hip-hop was regulated to New York, even though its musical stylings traveled to neighboring cities such as Boston and Philadelphia. In those cities, hip-hop was a cultural production of the city's individual sound and history, rather than that of an entire region.

The power of L.A.'s emergent style of gangsta rap was the first attempt by an outsider to change hip-hop. As L.A. rappers began to give those from NYC rappers a challenge, the surrounding cities were solidified under the East Coast banner.

Often lost in the retelling of hip-hop's birth are cities, regions and states in between the coasts. This absence may be due to the concentration of record labels and media corporations on the East and West Coast, or ill-informed beliefs that classify sections of the nation as backwards.

But expressions of hip-hop are expansive, and its culture is well represented in the South. A geographical region far larger than the coasts, the South stretches from Texas to Virginia. Along state lines, hip-hop finds itself at the intersection of Southernness and Blackness, leading to the creation of myriad subgenres.

Hip-hop sound traveled to New Orleans, where bounce was born in the city's housing projects, and to Memphis where it became buck and crunk. In Atlanta, snap and trap music reign supreme, while electronic bass booms along the beaches of Miami. In every state, hip-hop took on a new voice, new moniker, and new identity.

With each innovation, the sound was able to expand beyond state lines to a diverse, wide ranging language along the region. Instead of accommodating the voices of the East or the West, the South a.k.a. the Third Coast entered into hip-hop with something to say in its own language.

Listen to the Spotify playlist below or visit [Amazon Music](#), [Pandora](#) and [Apple Music](#) and take a journey through the diverse sounds of Southern hip-hop.



- 15 E No Mo Play In G/
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A Guide To Southern Hip-Hop · Rec

PREVIEW

A Brief History Of Dirty South Hip-Hop

The birth of Southern hip-hop begins at the 1995 Source Awards, where Atlanta based hip-hop duo [OutKast](#) won Best New Artist and Best New Rap of the Year for their debut album, *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*. As [André 3000](#) and [Big Boi](#) walked on stage, they were put with a chorus of boos. Although the ceremony was held at the height of East vs. West Coast rivalry, the coasts agreed on a singular purpose: The South had no claim to hip-hop.

There's one thing the coasts don't know about Southerners, especially Black Southerners. When your people and community have been culturally, socially, and politically oppressed, a few boos don't feel like much. This resistance was evident in André 3000's impassioned delivery of an acceptance speech, that served not only as a rebuke of bicoastal elites but a reverent call to arms for every rapper in the Southern United States.

"It's like this though. I'm tired of folks. You know what I'm saying? Close minded folks. You know what I'm saying? It's like we got a demo tape and nobody wants to hear it. But it's like this. The South got something to say. That's all I got to say."



Those words, uttered by a young André 3000, echoed through the South. Although the Atlanta group was the first Southern group to achieve mainstream recognition for their work, the first Southern hip-hop group to reach commercial success was the Geto Boys from Houston. Texas — a state, which is often referred to as its country, an amalgamation of different regional dialects and sounds — laid the foundation for André's charge.

After the duo left The Source Awards stage, [they swore to Goodie Mob, another Atlanta based group in attendance](#), "One day they're gonna have to f— with us." Months after the 1995 Source Awards, Goodie Mob released their own critically acclaimed debut, *Soul Food*. The album propelled Southern hip-hop to the masses, and featured a track entitled "Dirty South." The term, first used by Atlanta rapper Cool Breeze, gave a name to the burgeoning hip-hop movement south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Instead of rejecting the coastal elitism of hip-hop, the Dirty South embraced it — in fact they sold it. Rappers from the Dirty South did not emulate New York or L.A style; they reinterpreted and investigated cultural perceptions and stereotypes about being country, backwards, forgotten to the time and the nation. Southern rappers also interrogated America's past, present and future. For Black Southerners — whose cultural hallmarks and cornerstones are distinctly entwined with remnants of the Confederacy, the Klan, and the Civil Rights movement — hip-hop gave the ability to document a region and people lost to the American consciousness.

The aesthetics of Southern hip-hop were rooted in the power and reclamation of things once thought to be country: Gold dental crowns evolved into grills; the four pack of oversized white tees from the dollar store became a nightlife staple; André 3000, Pastor Troy, [Lil Jon](#) and [Ludacris](#) reinterpreted the Confederate flag. The attire of strippers from across the South became the blueprint for women's fashion. Cash Money introduced "[Bling Bling](#)" into the American consciousness.

B.G. - Bling Bling ft. Cash ...



While East Coast rap was heavily influenced by musical stylings of immigrants from the Caribbean with notes of funk and soul, rap in the Dirty South took inspiration from blues and gospel — genres birthed from hymns and psalms sung in the fields and plantations. The Dirty South brought their ancestors with them. Their rap style and delivery had an inherent country twang, an accent reminiscent of a period lost to time yet modern; its incorporation of rock 'n' roll, jazz, and funk embodied a contemporary Southern spirit.

If the introduction of West Coast rap struck fear in the East Coast, the South was a laughing stock, until the South started to sell in the early to mid 2000s. Some critics attribute the ascension of Southern hip-hop to the fatigue of the East vs. West Coast rivalry. Others say hip-hop was in need of a new start after the early passings of [the Notorious B.I.G.](#) and [Tupac Shakur](#). Whether both claims are true or false, the Dirty South was the future.

Notable Southern Hip-Hop Artists & Labels

Atlanta: The epicenter of the Dirty South. In the early 1980s, Atlanta's hip-hop started to get its foothold with airplay on local radio stations, artists being signed to Miami-based record labels, and early success on the music charts and the GRAMMYs. Rapper Mo-Jo, club DJ King Edward J, and Peter "MC Shy D" Jones were among the first in the city's hip-hop community. At the time Jones was signed to Luke Records, a Miami based record label started by Luke Campbell of the 2 Live Crew. The hyper localized scene benefited from the contributions of club DJs Kizzy Rock and DJ Smurf, who shifted Atlanta's sound from a Miami bass derivative into a distinctive sound.

From the mid 1980s, a number of local record labels emerged: Ichiban Records and Wrap Records. However when Antonio "L.A." Reid and Kenneth "[Babyface](#)" Edmonds moved to Atlanta in 1989, the local hip-hop scene changed. In the 1990s, their LaFace Records signed [Goodie Mob](#), [Outkast](#),

producers Organized Noize, [TLC](#), [Usher](#), [Xscape](#) and others. Meanwhile, Jermaine Dupri founded So So Def record label. Under the direction of Lil Jon, the label's A&R, the label signed Xscape, [Da Brat](#), [Jagged Edge](#), and more acts aligned with the R&B/hip-hop sound. As the signees of LaFace and So So Def Records triumphed, Def Jam Records hired Scarface of the Geto Boys to lead their Southern division, Def Jam South, which signed [Ludacris](#).

As a solo artist [Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz](#) released "We Still Crunk Up!," "Put Yo Hood Up," "Kings of Crunk," and "Crunk Juice," a series of albums credited with bringing crunk into the mainstream. The popularity of crunk and dance music was heralded by [Crime Mob](#), [D4L](#), [Dem Franchise Boyz](#), [Soulja Boy](#) and more who gave Atlanta hip-hop prominence not only in music but Internet culture.

New Orleans: In the aftermath of bounce music's expansion in the early 1990s, Parkway Pumpkin Records was the holding place of New Orleans' talent. [Mystikal](#), known then as Mystikal Mike, was one of the label's early signees. Along with Magnolia Slim, an architect of the New Orleans hip-hop sound. At the time, Parkway Pumpkin were free to record with other labels like Big Boy Records. When Master P moved back home from the Bay Area, his No Limit Records existed alongside local independent record labels like Cash Money, Take Fo', Tombstone and Untouchable.

In a strategic business move, No Limit Records took Mystikal, [Soulja Slim](#) (formerly known as Magnolia Slim), and producer KLC from Parkway Pumpkin. As well as the signing of his family members [C-Murder](#), [Silkk the Shocker](#), [Master P](#) signed [Mia X](#), the first lady of No Limit Records to the label. KLC, known as Craig S. Lawson, formed Beats by the Pound, the production behind No Limit Records. One of his first productions, *Down South Hustlers*, a compilation tape that featured New Orleans' first rap group New York Incorporated, signified No Limit Records attempt to exemplify Dirty South culture. Although No Limit Records secured a major label investment in 1996, [Cash Money Records](#) emerged in 1998 as a challenger with their new signees of [Juvenile](#), [Big Tymers](#), [Hot Boys](#), and [Lil Wayne](#) with production by Mannie Fresh.

Memphis: At Club No Name, the first club in Memphis to play hip-hop, DJ Spanish Fly originated as one of the first creators to bring Memphis rap into shape. Although the patrons' preference skewed towards electro, DJ Fly would incorporate his own preferences into mixes at Club No Name, Club Expo, and the Crystal Palace Skating Rink. His mixes maintained an ominous groove that included notes of electro but made room for moody rap. Though DJ Spanish Fly was among the first to evolve Memphis rap, DJ Squeezy defined the city's sound with the insertion of a SP-1200 and Roland keyboard.

His influence can be heard in early mixtapes from DJ Paul and Juicy J. DJ Paul and Lord Infamous, his half brother formed [the Serial Killaz](#). When the duo met with Juicy J, the three formed [The Backyard Posse](#). Over time, the group added Koopsta Knicca, Crunchy Black, and [Gangsta Boo](#). The six person group was renamed [Three 6 Mafia](#) and released their first album, *Mystic Stylez* under Prophet Records. *Mystic Stylez* also featured the female rapper [La Chat](#) and [Project Pat](#), the brother of Juicy J. Shortly after their deal, the group parted ways with Prophet and formed their own label Hypnotize Minds. La Chat also released "Murder She Spoke," her debut album on the record label.

Under the direction of DJ Paul and Juicy J, the rappers under the Hypnotize Minds label achieved commercial and critical success, as well as an Academy Award for [It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp](#) for

Hustle & Flow, a drama set in Memphis that follows DJay (played by Terrence Howard), a pimp and drug dealer with aspirations of becoming a rapper.

Miami: Before hip-hop migrated down from New York, [Miami already had a DJ style](#). In Miami, the DJs would be "regulating": or "mic checkin'," where the DJ brought down the record for a short period of time and insert their own lyrics to remix the song in a similar fashion to reggae and dancehall DJs. [In the late 1970s and early 1980s](#), DJs would travel with their generators, turntables, speakers, and equipment to perform in public and private spaces across the city.

As local DJs put their spin on hip-hop, the city's rappers energetic sound which came to be known as Miami bass, a diasporic influenced heavy bass sound that contained elements of electro and synthesizers were heard in the music of the Gucci Crew, Clay D, MC A.D.E., and the [2 Live Crew](#). The 2 Live Crew was the first to bring the Miami bass sound to the mainstream. The group released their albums under then Skyywalker Records (now Luke Records), member Luther Campbell's record label. Their success came at a cost. The sexually explicit nature of their lyrics resulted in a federal court obscenity trial, which established the precedent for censorship in music.

In the mid to late 1990s, Slip-n-Slide Records, a label founded by Ted Lucas, signed [Trick Daddy](#), a Liberty City resident who thematically used the language of gangsta rap to speak about the struggles and challenges of living in a disenfranchised area. However, it was [Trina](#) who joined Trick Daddy on "[Nann N—a](#)," who put the city, its women, and women across the Dirty South with her as refuted Trick Daddy on his own track. "Da Baddest Bitch," her debut album released on Slip N Slide label put her in conversation with [Lil' Kim](#) and [Foxy Brown](#) as a contender for the Queen of hip-hop title.

Subgenres Of Southern Hip-Hop

For the past two decades, the Dirty South has been responsible for hip-hop's expansion and evolution. The region has conducted a variety of sonic experiments and melodic sounds to produce an expansive lexicon that represents the conflict, tension, and joy about being Black in the South.

Southern hip-hop does not shy away from the underground, but rather embraces it. The music in itself is a contradiction: A track used for shaking ass at the strip clubs, while patrons eat chicken wings, can originate from a gospel beat. Because to be Black in the South, where your ancestors were once enslaved, is disorienting.

Bounce music: New Orleans has a vast musical history and structure: The chanting of the Mardi Gras Indians, the brass of the second line bands, and the expressiveness of parade culture cultivated a music of lively and celebration. When hip-hop arrived, it incorporated notes of the existing styles into a call-and-response formula over a series of rhythmic beats which invoked attendees into dance. Originating in the city's housing projects, this new style of bounce music took a new life in the city's nightlife. Folks felt called to participate in the chanting, the hyper-localized lyrics, and high energy drum patterns familiar to second line culture. Although Big Freedia, is known as the Queen of Bounce Music, and rightfully so. The musician got their start working with Katey Red, "[the first trans woman bounce artist](#)."

Buck music: Within Memphis' skating rinks and club cultures a dance music that ricocheted through the body, was born. Local DJs reinterpreted samples of soul and funk music, keyboard melodies of the Black church, with distinctive time signatures and cadences, on top of electronic-focused bass to give rise to a lexicon of dance styles including jookin' and stomping. The heavy bass music stylings of Memphis also gave birth to trap and crunk, two styles most associated with Atlanta.

Crunk music: What would crunk music be without its patron saint [Lil Jon](#)? Although the rapper-producer cannot lay claim to the origins of the musical style, in the early 2000s, Lil Jon & the Eastside Boyz brought crunk to popular culture. Known for its party-centered lyrics and uptempo rhythms, crunk music became synonymous with Atlanta's club and strip culture. The shouting, the energetic call and response, the chanting; crunk became the loud, bold, vocal expression of the city's youth and music culture. To be crunk was to be excited.

Snap music: Snap music, an Atlanta-based form of hip-hop, was ushered in by the rise of handheld technology and social media sites like YouTube in the early 2000s. In lieu of a snare or clap, a snap was inserted as a replacement, often complemented by a whistle. The songs, which shared components of crunk, were exemplified by an accompanying dance and uploaded to social media sites (in much the same way Gen Z does on TikTok).

Miami bass: Miami, the city of two Souths. One foot in the Southern United States, the other in the geographical South. The demographic, geographic, and cultural mix of Cuban and Haitian, as well as Southern Blackness, produced an eccentric style of hip-hop. Elongated bass built on layered rhythmic production, and short, repetitive phrases ushered in a shout and response style became hallmarks of Miami bass. Played around 125 beats per minute, the style flourished in Miami's car scene as well as party and adult entertainment culture.

Trap music: If crunk and snap music were symbols of the jovial Atlanta, then trap emerged as a symbol of the city and Black America's underground. In a nation where Black communities experienced the onslaught of War on Drugs policies and excessive policing, the only way towards economic freedom was to hustle, and the hymn of the hustle and struggle was trap. Embedded with the dark lyrical content, multilayered kick drums, hi hats and synthesized drums was the moodiness of the duffle bag boy trying to survive. Over time, a holy trinity of the Roland TR-808, snare rolls, and first hand experience gave birth to a style where dope boys could be referred to as kings.

Definitive Southern Hip-Hop Songs

Three 6 Mafia - "Tear Da Club Up '97" (1997): The conveying of electric bodies in movement can result in one of two ways. The first, a baby. The second, an ass whooping. The club is also a multifaceted place where you can meet the love of your life or the person (or people) who have been "talkin' that s—," as Three 6 Mafia say. This is the environment where "Tear Da Club Up" resides.

The song serves as a call to action. On a good night, the song is a declaration of celebration. On a bad night, an ominous premonition of what's to come. "Tear Da Club Up" was banned in 17 states, but established the precedent for crunk anthems like "Knuck If You Buck," and the movement of club-esque songs that served a dual purpose for fighting.

"Tear Da Club Up" remains a reminder of what a night out looks like with Three 6 Mafia.



Gangsta Boo - "Where Dem Dollas At" (1998): In an industry, where the contributions of Black women are used to build the empires of men in hip-hop, Gangsta Boo refused to be silenced. She knew that the voices of young Black women and girls from the South, belonged at that table.

While Juicy J and DJ Paul used Three 6 Mafia to construct their own kingdom in the Third Coast, Gangsta Boo did not sit idly by. Her appearances on Three 6 Mafia's "Mystic Stylez" and "Enquiring Minds" were small glimpses of her power, but her christening was "Where Dem Dollas At." The Queen of Memphis had arrived.

Her presence made the appearance of Juicy J and DJ Paul irrelevant. Her lines became a chant, a psalm, a swift rebuke for every woman who had been taken advantage of by a man and needed a fierce reminder of their power. It made men in Memphis and hip-hop understand exactly what it meant to be a lady from the Third Coast: to endure, to preserve, and to hustle when the odds are against you. To this day if you hear a woman recite "Where Dem Dollas At," know she has conjured the spirit of Gangsta Boo and it would be best to return the money owed by you.

Gangsta Boo - Where De...



Trick Daddy feat. Trina - "Nann N—" (1998): Hip-hop has always encouraged the back and forth among emcees — the exchanging of verses, the pointed attention to detail, the eventual crescendo to eviscerate an opponent. There is a reason why battle rap is tethered to its name. Although the spirit of competition has always been omnipresent, the battles were always centered around men. Whenever a woman enters the battle and annihilates an opponent — as Roxanne Shanté did at the Battle for World Supremacy — the man still emerges as the victor. It was as if femininity was the deciding factor of who could win a battle or not. Until Trina came around.

That is not to say Trina was the first to win a one-on-one battle with a male MC. But, she is the first to utilize femininity in a pointed way to take down an opponent. The first half of "Nann N—" is an elongated list of the ways masculinity has empowered Trick Daddy. In the second half, Trina details the ways her femininity grants her access to things Trick Daddy could not even dream of. The deployment of her sly, viperous lines and sweet, Southern wit took apart Trick Daddy's line bit by bit. Until she was left as the last person standing.

The positive reception and response to "Nann N—" placed Trina in conversation with the women rappers of that era, and laid the framework for the next generation of women rappers from the South.

Trick Daddy ft. Trina - Na...



Juvenile feat. Mannie Fresh & Lil Wayne - "Back That Azz Up" (1999): The opening notes of "Back That Azz Up" are all it takes for people to throw their booties in a series of fashions. Whether circular or up down, the song does not shake about the positionality of where you throw ass, as long as you are shaking it.

The holy trinity of Mannie Fresh, Juvenile and Lil Wayne not only introduced New Orleans bounce music into the mainstream, but jump started Cash Money Records' takeover of the 2000s. There is no greater party song, revered by people of all generations, genders, races, and creeds than "Back That Azz Up."

Juvenile - Back That Tha...



Crime Mob feat. Lil Scrappy - "Knuck If You Buck" (2004): For Black youth in the South, there are few outlets to express rage. Crunk music is emo music for Black people, and provides the language to release and move through the torments of being Black in America. For a group of teenagers from outside of Atlanta, Crime Mob were the originators of this type of youth-specific music.

The group, composed of M.I.G., Cyco Black, Princess, Lil' Jay, Diamond, and Killa C. were the voices of young Black Atlanta.

Recorded in a closet at producer Lil Jay's house with a knockout track by his little sister, Princess, "Knuck If You Buck" became a rallying cry for Southern teens. With a beat inspired by a brawl at Lil Jay's house and the stylings of DJ Paul and Juicy J, the song quickly became the group's biggest hit.

"Yeah, we knuckin and buckin and ready to fight. I betcha I'ma throw them things, so haters best to think twice," became the go-to chant for a country-ass brawl. With the addition of Diamond's delivery of "Bitch you irrelevant, step to my residence. Best to back up 'fore I fill you with lead," in the fourth line; the song solidified the pair (Diamond and Princess) as the breakout stars on the collective track.

Their presence welcomed women to the crunk fight. Where their verbal expressions of anger and violence were warmly received for over 15 years, generations of Black youth have sought solace in this song and whooped ass to it as well.

Crime Mob - Knuck If You...



Southern Hip-Hop Artists On the Rise

If the Dirty South is the future, the future of Southern hip-hop is female. Jucee Froot, [GloRilla](#), DoeChii, Kaliii, KenTheMan, Monaleo, TiaCorine and Baby Tate are among the latest rappers to carry the Dirty South sound and aesthetic. Meanwhile, [Saucy Santana](#) and [Lil Nas X](#) are changing the South's presentation in terms of gender identity and expression.

Cultural and societal perceptions of the South have changed greatly, in due part to a new generation of entertainers who champion the South on a continual basis: Houston has found another champion in [Megan Thee Stallion](#); Miami's new voice is found in the City Girls; in Memphis, GloRilla is carrying on the legion of Gangsta Boo who died in January of this year; and Atlanta has a diverse array of women rappers that prove the city does not have one singular sound.

GloRilla – Put It On Da Floor (GloMix)



By the early 2000s, the classifier "Dirty South" became less of a communal touchstone and more of a marketing term by record labels in Atlanta. But it was less of a marked loss and more of a massive cultural shift.

By the mid 2000s, Southern rappers became the dominant voices in hip-hop, and largely took over pop culture. Evidenced by trap music migrating out of Atlanta to pop and genres across the world, the cultural exports of Southern hip-hop can also be found in streetwear and luxury fashion. Within the industry, Dirty South legends like Lil Wayne were honored at [the Black Music Collective's Recording Academy Honors](#) during the 2023 GRAMMY Awards.

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